

Chapter 5 + Interlude Reading Response

Interface design is incredibly important in video games. Throughout the course of reading this chapter and the subsequent interlude (and in between spurts of reading, since my attention span is miserable), I found myself thinking about and playing a game called Cook, Serve, Delicious! Whenever I play this game, I feel a sense of flow akin to no other. Cook, Serve, Delicious!, as Principle 5.17 recommends, provides an embodied interface. There are a lot of nuances to how they accomplished this, so it's time for a deep dive!

The main menu of the game has an email client open as well as tabs that take you to your active food menu, upgrades shop, and various other important screens.



The email client perfectly demonstrates Perry's Principle I.1: funny is often better than serious. Interspersed in the functional (green and yellow) emails above are completely useless (gray) spam emails that serve purely as satire of the modern corporate world. (This screenshot is from the second game as I couldn't find one immediately from the first game.)



There is an option to purchase a spam filter, but to me, this detracts from the essential whimsy of the game. Everything in the game is goofy: the premise of cooking food using your keyboard, the lighthearted (yet powerfully stressful) background music, and the comic-esque avatars waiting for their orders. This brings us to the gameplay.

In *Cook, Serve, Delicious!*, you must craft dishes exactly according to customer specification in a high-stress multitasking environment. Orders come into slots on the left; once you press the corresponding number, you make the order by pressing appropriate keys on your keyboard in (preferably) rapid succession. The mappings to the ingredients tend to correspond to the first letter of the ingredient in question, so the user can immediately glean the appropriate response from just a glance at the order. In terms of the mapping from user keyboard input to food order output, this makes logical sense. However, the beauty of the game comes not from the obvious mapping chosen, but from how the mapping remutualizes the input, output, and human.



First off, it is clear that the game designers put a lot of effort into ensuring that the game is as low-latency as possible. Animations and sounds for food actions are snappy and immediate. Thus, the input, output, and human all feel like one fluid action whenever a button is pressed. The perception/feedback to intention loop as depicted on page 237 is optimized so that the user feels like every keypress is tight, responsive, and effective. Even the placement and design of game elements optimizes flow. For example, the fried chicken in the game gives off clouds of white smoke when it's finished cooking, which allows the user to look elsewhere for valuable information (such as the order list) and snap back to the chicken when it has finished. Also, the fast pace of the dreaded rush hour provides enough of a challenge that the game begins to feel more like an instrument or rhythm game. Though one can rebind the keys if they are so inclined (perhaps for accessibility), I feel that the instrument-like feeling of the game comes from the fact that sometimes letters are overloaded and (O)lives and o(N)ions can't have the same letter. Following the principle that smart instruments often aren't (on page 290 in the interlude), the

game embraces the absurdity of its ingredient-to-letter mapping and challenges the user to think laterally, quickly, and in an unorthodox manner in order to master the mechanics.

Once you get into the rhythm of Cook, Serve, Delicious!, the stress is, somewhat oxymoronicly, quite relaxing. I found myself craving the flow state of the game whenever I wasn't playing. Perhaps it is the capitalist conditioning, or maybe just the need for dopamine from each perfectly executed order, but I think there is a meditative state reached while playing the game. This is in no small part due to the whimsy, embodiment, and overall character of the game's interface.